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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 001250

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NSC FOR AHARRIMAN, KAMEND
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CENTCOM FOR CG CFC-A, CG CJTF-76 POLAND
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SUBJECT: PRT/MAZAR-E SHARIF: BALKH PROVINCE POLITICIANS
DEMAND ATTA'S OUSTER

Classified By: POL COUNSELOR ANGUS SIMMONS FOR REASONS
1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Mazar PRToff met with representatives from four political groups from Balkh Province. The representatives planned to travel to Kabul to meet with President Karzai and formally register a complaint against Governor Atta Muhammad Nur (a.k.a. Ustad Atta) for offenses ranging from corruption to murder. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On February 23, PRToff met for over two hours with members of four political parties in Balkh - the Prosperity Party (Tajik), the Justice Party (Uzbek), the Wahdat Party (Hazara) and a Pashtun-based party. The representatives repeatedly stressed that either Governor Ustad Atta must be replaced or his enemies (including the participants in the meeting) would be prepared to return the province to a state of civil war. They claimed that Atta's tenure as governor had been marked by corruption, abuse of power, and murder. Their charges included the following: A) Atta personally planned and financed the murders of 22 political opponents, including slain parliamentary candidate Ashraf Tamzan; B) after a regional commander, Shafi, was implicated in a wide variety of crimes including murder and narco-trafficking, Atta appointed him the district chief of police for Sholgara; and C) Atta, through a network of corrupt police, prosecutors, and other appointed officials, has completely undermined the rule of law in the province, to the point where he has alienated the general populace and all major political groups.

¶3. (C) The four expressed outrage that Karzai had moved many governors away from their bases of power, while leaving Atta

in his regional stronghold, allowing him to run Balkh as a personal fiefdom. When it was pointed out that, were Atta to leave, Jumbesh might control the entire north, they agreed that only a neutral governor from another region would be a proper replacement, exerting a moderating influence on the increasingly unstable province.

¶4. (C) The four claim they have all approached both Karzai and ISAF on separate occasions regarding this issue, but that no resolution had been forthcoming from either. They now plan to present Karzai with irrefutable evidence of Atta's criminal behavior in the form of a recording that captures him planning an assassination. If Karzai continues to refuse to act, they claim they will "return to the mountains" and re-mobilize their respective militias.

¶5. (C) During the meeting, the four occasionally disagreed on some minor points, such as where power bases were strongest, or the degree to which Jumbesh is a destabilizing force in the north, but all were unified in their resolve to see Atta removed, and stuck with the collective decision to resort to force failing a workable alternative.

¶6. (C) It was pointed out that civil war was not a solution itself, but rather a failure to find a solution. All agreed, but felt there was no other choice at this point. PRToff encouraged the delegates to seek a peaceful solution that would address their grievances in a constructive way, while avoiding bringing further hardship upon the Afghan people.

¶7. (C) Comment: PRT Mazar-e Sharif (MeS) and Embassy have long been concerned about Governor Atta's record, and some of

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these claims (except the charge of murdering Ashraf Tamzan, which is widely thought by the international community to have been the result of an internal struggle) have been substantiated earlier. The appointment of Shafi to his post in Sholgara has been of particular concern to PRT MeS, as the district is a known focus for anti-government activity and Shafi, if not complicit, is certainly not helpful in that regard. PRToff believes the concerns should be taken seriously, as should the threats. While using militias for political gain is a tactic common in the north, recent reports of a significant increase in weapons purchases in the region corroborate some of the delegates' claims. According to the party representative, the general population is buying AKs in preparing for what it is seen as an inevitable conflict between the many factions in the area. While the reasoning behind Atta's appointment is apparent - to offset Jumbesh influence, which would otherwise dominate all levels of politics and law in the north - it seems the cure may be worse than the disease. Though it may be valuable to maintain some degree of pluralization in the north, the suggestion that a neutral governor be brought in is certainly worthy of further consideration. As the Tajik participant put it, "Jumbesh runs Jowzjan and Jamiat runs Balkh, how can Karzai create this situation and not expect war?"

NORLAND